

Sisterhood

Deployment TIPS for families

- ➔ Be a good role model by demonstrating good coping techniques.
- ➔ Allow and encourage children to express their feelings and try to accept them.
- ➔ Establish rules and limits, as a family, BEFORE deployment around the issues of:
 - Consequences for disobeying family rules.
 - Money and allowances.
 - Chores and responsibilities.
 - Avoid saying, "Wait until your father/mother gets home!"
 - Be flexible enough to adjust the rules and limits as necessary
- ➔ Spend time together as a family, with each child and as a couple.
- ➔ Emphasize the importance of school:
 - Visit school before deployment and talk to teacher.
 - Leave stamped envelopes for teacher to mail progress reports, schoolwork, etc.
 - Tell your child that school is important.
 - Send cards, letters, pictures, foreign money, restaurant menus, etc to class.

Guard daughters hold first conference for teen girls

Moranda Hern

Kaylei Deakin



Nearly 100 teenage girls from throughout California gathered in March to take part in the Sisterhood of the Traveling BDUs event. (Photo by Tech. Sgt. David J. Loeffler)

By Air Force Maj. Kimberly Holman CALIFORNIA NATIONAL GUARD

In a popular movie, "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants," a group of teenage girls keep in contact with each other by sharing a pair of jeans.

That theme provided the inspiration

for an idea by two California National Guard daughters, but instead of a pair of jeans, battle dress uniforms (BDU) became the shared bond between more than 100 girls.

Seventeen-year-olds Kaylei Deakin and Moranda Hern met at California first lady Maria Shriver's 2008 Women's Conference. The girls found they had many things in common, including a need to feel understood while going through the challenges that military deployments bring to families.

After more than a year of planning and organizing, Deakin and Hern brought teenage girls together from across California for a weekend in March that coincidentally marked the seventh anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq.

"I remember watching stories about the war in class, and people would giggle and

BENEFITS of deployments for teens

- Increased independence and self-confidence.
- Strengthened relationship with parent at home.
- Families learn to establish goals and plan together.
- Re-evaluation of rules.
- Teen and deployed parent may become closer through letters, e-mails, cards and packages.
- Teen learns about the world and world affairs.



laugh as the bombs were going off," said Kaylei, whose father left to fight in Afghanistan a few years later, when she was 13. "I was so worried ... thinking about what was going on over there."

She said her father's deployment affected her family long before and long after he left California. She felt like no one really understood the empty feeling she had inside as she watched her world change dramatically while her dad was deployed.

For the two years he was gone, Kaylei felt depressed and lonely, and she felt she needed to step up in her father's absence to provide strength beside her mother and take over in areas of sibling discipline.

When Kaylei met Moranda, they found they shared similar experiences. Moranda's father is in the Air Guard, while Kaylei's father is in the Army Guard. And at times when the girls needed their friends' support the most, the girls felt that they were very alone.

"People saw a big change in me after my dad left, and a lot of them just stopped coming around because they weren't sure of what to say or how to act around me," said Moranda, whose father deployed to Afghanistan on very short notice when she was 15. "I felt like I was just some weird person who couldn't get it together."

Realizing there were thousands of girls going through similar experiences, Kaylei and Moranda decided to form a support network and organize a first-ever conference for daughters of military members.

The girls put together a proposal and brought a presentation to Brig. Gen. Mary J. Kight, who was the assistant adjutant general of the California National Guard at the time, whom the girls had met at the 2008 Women's Conference.

Kight was impressed and vowed to do everything she could to support the effort.

"The Guard provided the Sisterhood of the Traveling BDUs with the structure, and

the girls provided all the innovation, imagination and creativity," she said. "I am so proud of them for seeing this through, and what a wonderful program they have founded."

The two high schoolers raised \$30,000 through various corporate sponsors to provide an all-expenses-paid weekend for girls ages 13-17.

The conference theme was "Unite, Inspire, Lead," and girl-power was ever-present throughout the weekend. The girls arrived at the conference in semi-formal attire on the first evening for a "purple carpet" event, complete with flashing cameras and a receiving line that included Kaylei, Moranda and Kight, who is now the adjutant general of the California Guard.

The weekend included several guest speakers, including an Olympic gold medalist, a Hollywood image consultant and corporate executives. Workshops and break-out sessions brought girls together on issues ranging from self-esteem, self-image and career plans, to boys and relationships.

The venue provided a nonthreatening environment, while the sisterly support provided teens an opportunity to reach out and share stories and get to know each other.

Many of the girls discussed their fear of something happening to a parent in combat. Others shared the experience of attempting to console a worried mother while Dad is away, or knowing that one of their parents won't be able to see them go to prom or graduate from high school.

Kaylei plans to enlist in the Marines after graduating from high school in June, and Moranda has been accepted into the Air Force Academy. Many other girls at the conference also have plans to follow in their parents' footsteps.

"I hope that the girls come away from this knowing that the next time a deployment rolls around that they will be supported, and that they have a network — it won't have to be the way it's always been," Moranda said on the last night of the conference.

Kaylei and Moranda hope other teen girls will keep the "sisterhood" alive and will call upon each other for help when they need it. They plan to go national with the organization and create chapters in other states during the next year.

unite, inspire, lead

Deployment CHECKLIST for parents of teens

☒ Are you aware of the developmental milestones your teenager may be achieving? They are:

- Gaining independence and becoming more responsible.
- Trying new behaviors.
- Unpredictable - new friends, hairstyles, piercing, clothes, music, etc.
- Questioning the "status quo."
- Are aware of world issues.

☒ Do you know how does your teen typically react to stress? They may:

- Have personality changes such being moody, loud, or quiet.
- Challenge parent's ideas and way of life.
- Be very sensitive and feel misunderstood.
- Experience a drop in school performance.
- Experiment with alcohol or drugs.

☒ Have you had a family meeting to discuss the deployment?

☒ Have you told your teenager where you are going, why you are going and approximately when you will return, if known?

☒ Have you addressed any concerns your teen may have about safety?

☒ Have you made a communication plan with your teenager, provided them with your email and regular mail address, and asked them to keep in touch?

☒ Have you reminded your teen that school work is important and that you'd like to receive progress reports from them?

☒ Did you include money in your budget for phone calls, gifts/souvenirs for your teenager?

☒ Do you and your teen have a support system — people you can reach in person, by phone or email — you can turn to for assistance during the deployment?

☒ Have you avoided putting added responsibilities on your teen by not making comments such as "You're the man in the family" or "Take care of your little brother"?